

LDAC OPINION

Promoting regional sustainable fisheries management for shared fisheries resources in West Africa

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The LDAC welcomes the EU's leadership for the promotion of international Ocean Governance, as well as its commitment to make the future EU-Africa partnership visible and tangible for African and European citizens alike.

In that context, and to sustain livelihoods from fisheries in the west African region, the LDAC calls for the EU to support efforts towards the regional management of shared resources in West Africa, including through its Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs) with the countries of the region, as well as, on the longer term, the establishment of a Regional Fisheries Management Organization (RFMO) covering the waters off West Africa.

The LDAC believes that such efforts are urgently needed to ensure that fisheries resources are assessed, managed and exploited in a sustainable and transparent manner, for the benefit primarily of African consumers.

We note the European Commission's support for the transformation of the Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF) into an RFMO as the most appropriate and effective way to establish a non-tuna RFMO in West Africa. The LDAC was informed that the EU has funded a study¹ to identify options to support a better functioning of CECAF.

This document focuses on the capacity building dimension and financing of CECAF, but does not make any proposals in relation to the transformation of CECAF into an RFMO. In fact, the study even refrains from examining the prospects of transformation to an RFMO, leaving the debate for later, as it states the following:

¹ The study is available on this link: <http://www.fao.org/3/ca9297b/CA9297B.pdf>

“If contemplating the transformation of CECAF into a RFMO could initially be regarded as challenging (and we are aware that there is debate on this to which we will return), the initial focus would then fall on its existing functions, and RFMO prospects considered later (although how much later is also open to debate)” (p. 12).

In the LDAC’s view, it is essential at this stage to complement this work with a perspective on the concrete steps that would lead to the formation of a non-tuna RFMO in West Africa.

For almost a decade, the LDAC has maintained a cooperation with the Ministerial Conference on Fisheries Cooperation among African States bordering the Atlantic Ocean (ATLAFCO/COMHAFAT)², and we were recently informed about the results of a study commissioned by COMHAFAT following a recommendation by the Fisheries Ministers of its member countries, to establish a regional framework for the management of shared fisheries resources.

This study presents a draft founding Convention of a new RFMO, proposing specific solutions to establish a binding international legal framework to promote cooperation among African coastal states in identifying and implementing management measures to stop the cycle of overfishing. This new RFMO structure would be structured along the existing models, with a Commission with the power to adopt binding conservation and management measures, and subsidiary bodies to support its work (Administrative and Financial Committee, Compliance Committee, Scientific Committee and Executive Secretariat).

This new instrument would take into account the specificities of the Atlantic coast of Africa area, i.e., mainly (i) a scope covering small pelagic and/or demersal stocks exploited only within the boundaries of the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of coastal States and (ii) exploited stocks which are distributed within the EEZs of a maximum of 4 to 5 coastal States. This last specificity suggests the need to adopt a regional approach in the decision-making process as is done by other RFMOs, such as the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM).

² <https://www.comhafat.org/>

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It also highlights the different roles existing regional/sub-regional fisheries bodies could play, to avoid duplication of work and ensure efficient synergies.

The study notes that Contracting Parties may wish to adopt, as a priority, management and conservation measures for shared small pelagic and/or demersal stocks that are of particular importance for the food security of African populations, due to the need to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations, and in particular SDG 14.

We are of the opinion that this work provides a vital complement to the study produced by CECAF, which could lead to the establishment of a non-tuna RFMO in West Africa. We call on the EU to consider this important work in its efforts to promote the sustainable management of shared stocks in West Africa. The formation of a non-tuna RFMO in West Africa is a long-term solution to this challenge.

On the shorter term, the EU can already contribute to regional management efforts by supporting the FAO working group on small pelagics. It should also proactively support specific cooperation between West Africa neighboring states with which it has an SFPA and/or dialogue under the EU IUU Regulation, for example in the field of scientific research and fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, in order to gradually move towards a concerted management of these resources.

Last, in the specific context of the EU-Mauritania SFPA current negotiations, we suggest the following implementing actions within the framework of a future SFPA, in order to promote the regional management of shared resources of small pelagics:

- (1) Considerably increase the sampling of pelagic catches;**
- (2) Implement the recommendations of the FAO working group on the assessment of small pelagic species off North-West Africa;**
- (3) Initiate consultations with neighboring Senegal on the joint management of sardinella.**